

**Original citation:**

Wyness, Michael G. (2018) *The recognition and distribution of children's agency in the UK*. In: Dintner, S. and Schneider, R., (eds.) *Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Childhood in Contemporary Britain*. Studies in Childhood : 1700 to the present . New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 250-271. ISBN 9781138232105.

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**Publisher's statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in *Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Childhood in Contemporary Britain* on 17/11/2017, available online: <https://www.routledge.com/Transdisciplinary-Perspectives-on-Childhood-in-Contemporary-Britain-Literature/Dinter-Schneider/p/book/9781138232105> "

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## **Children's participation – definitions, narratives and disputes**

### **Introduction**

In recent years children's participation has become a dominant theme within childhood studies and child related policy and practice. It challenges hitherto conventional ideas of the dependent and incompetent child bringing into sharp focus developmental assumptions of children's 'ages and stages'. Conceptually participation emerges from and is closely associated with children's agency which focuses on children's capacities and their formative influence within their environments (Oswell, 2013). The idea of children's participation brings a practical and political dimension to the idea of agency. However, as participation has become an orthodoxy within the field, so there has been critical examination of the nature, range and authenticity of various forms of children's participation (Wyness, 2013; Valentine, 2011). In doing so, within the research and to a lesser extent the policy and practice realms, participation has become more contested in both theoretical and empirical terms.

In this paper I examine a range of meanings and forms of participation that characterises the field of children's participation. I will outline some of the disputes within the field. Despite a lack of consensus as to the meaning of children's participation, I will argue that policy makers and practitioners nationally and globally have settled on a narrow institutionalised mode of children's participation, a set of normative ideas and practices, what I call the dominant narrative, that is, a normative way of thinking about children's participation. I will discuss this in the first part of the paper focusing on the institutional, discursive and developmental aspects of participation. In the second part of the paper I examine critical responses to this dominant institutional narrative. Drawing mainly on the work of scholars from within child studies I

discuss a number of critical themes and claims in terms of a critical narrative. In the third part of the paper I tease out some of the implications of these critical claims through an emergent narrative, a more up-to-date review of research within the field. These trends or narratives are not mutually exclusive as the emergent narrative accommodates many of the institutional forms found within the dominant narrative. In essence, more recent work within the field of children's participation is much broader and multi-dimensional incorporating institutional and more embedded forms. In the final part of the chapter I reflect on conceptual developments within children's participation and draw on the work of Archard's (2015) reworking of Rawls concept/conception framework in providing a framework for examining children's participation.

## **Dominant Narrative**

### *Institutional*

There are innovative initiatives that generate youth engagement in a range of fields. Nevertheless, the dominant modes of children's participation tend to be more formalised and institutionalised, with an emphasis on adult regulation. The rights agenda has had a formative influence here. In particular, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (CRC) drawn on by policy makers and practitioners at local and global levels, includes articles that support the idea that children have participatory rights, a right to a voice in affairs that directly affect them (Landsdown, 2012). These normative modes of participation focus on pre-existing institutional arrangements where adults initiate and shape the form and direction that participation takes. Various institutional settings are relevant here including schooling, health,

care and protection, local authority and community (Alderson, 2008; Kirby & Gibbs, 2007; Fielding, 2007). For the most part adults in positions of authority consult children on their views and perspectives on various issues (Wyness, 2013). In particular, various consultation exercises take place in schools and local authorities aimed at involving children in data gathering exercises: agendas and processes are normally established before the participation takes place. Children's participation is modeled on adult-driven conceptions of voice and democracy. The school or youth council offers a clear example of participation based on liberal democratic principles (Wyness, 2009). Elaborate systems of communication are assembled through which children represent the opinions and ideas of their peers. Children represent children: they are expected to 'hold office' for a limited period participating in highly choreographed events and meetings. In theory, child representatives often known as school or youth councillors provide an institutional link between the teaching and adult staff and their peers in conveying the pupils' perspectives. It is now an expectation that all schools have some version of this model, with schools, health services and local authorities having a much stronger commitment to children's voices (Wyness, 2015). The representative model seems to enable professionals to both hear children and incorporate their voices within on-going institutional structures and practices.

### *Discursive*

As we will see later in the paper, participation can take many forms. However, the dominant institutional mode of children's participation is discursive. The concept of voice is crucial and viewed as an expression of their rights. States are now judged internationally on the basis of how well children's views are articulated. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child stated that in the UK "education law and policy" not enough has been done to encourage greater "respect for the views of the child" (UN, 2008). Participation here is framed in terms of voice, with states

judged in terms of the extent to which children have a voice. Interestingly, this is something to which children themselves are committed. Children take a pragmatic line in terms of modes of participation. Children view participation as an entitlement; at the same time, they are happy to be consulted on a range of issues in school where there is an expectation that adults and professionals will listen and act on their choices and perspectives (Stafford et al 2003; Hill 2006). According to this research, children's voices in school and in other contexts need to carry weight; children need to feel that what they say is making a difference.

### *Developmental*

While institutions value the perspectives of children as children, the dominant narrative also views participation in developmental and educational terms. Participation becomes an important dimension of children's preparation for adulthood. Normative models located within institutions are a rehearsal for future life: an important vehicle for children's acquisition of experience and knowledge in citizenship and politics. In schools participation can more easily follow developmental trajectories that take account of their cognitive/linguistic and socio-emotional capacities. In many Western countries participation is a more integral part of social and citizenship curriculums in school where children are incrementally prepared for a later adult life as full citizens with access to liberal democratic political rights (Skelton, 2007). We can see this if we return to the liberal democratic models of participation found. Electoral politics are practiced relatively safely within schools with child representatives trained to be sensitive to the voices of their 'constituent' peers and the latter able to practice the kinds of judgements they might make in adulthood as voters (Wyness, 2003). Within these terms children are carefully propelled along

increasingly complex career paths or trajectories where participation expands and reinforces the work already carried out by parents and teachers.

There is also an element of developing an awareness of ‘real world’ limits on desires and aspirations; developing a sense of obligations and responsibilities. Children learn to frame their interests within institutional agendas which narrow the possibilities for the realization of these interests. Thus, some of these interests are unlikely to make their way onto the school council agenda. Children learn about realpolitik; their participation has to accommodate the ‘realities’ of institutional life, providing a rehearsal for the later real world of diplomacy and compromise.

### **Critical Narrative**

More formal and institutional models of children’s participation have become more popular, and participation has become part of research orthodoxy within childhood studies. In response to this children’s participation has been subject to considerable critical appraisal (Cockburn & Cleaver, 2007; Pinkney, 2011; Treseder, 1997). First of all, the location of participation within institutions such as the school and the local authority has meant that initiatives often have to fit—in with adult agendas. Adults initiate children’s participation within institutional settings: children tend to be dependent on adults for support, legitimacy and continuity (Wyness, 2009). Thus, outcomes and processes are often tied to broader institutional aims and commitments with children having limited involvement in the latter. This can also mean that children’s participatory initiatives mirror or imitate adult models of participation, particularly the emphasis on electoral processes making it more ritualised and less likely to engage with children’s interests. There is evidence to suggest that children are capable of participating in these adult modes of political representation

(Wyness, 2009). However, school councils can become highly constrained in terms of their agendas with children's access to particular areas within the school agenda regulated by teaching staff. Research also suggests that these are not the most effective forms of representation or participation, with more informal modes of participation favoured by children (Cockburn & Cleaver, 2009).

Secondly, there are concerns that dominant forms of participation are used in a superficial way to engender the support of children with little regard for their efficacy in terms of whether they make a difference to children's lives. Hart's ladder of participation (1997) has been drawn on as a blueprint for working with children within organisations. Within this framework participatory initiatives move from one rung upwards to the next rung where there is a gradual increase in levels of children's involvement as both collaborators with adults and initiators of different forms of participation. Children learn and develop their social and political capacities as they move up the ladder. The ladder is also drawn on as a critical frame within which children's participation is assessed (Treseder, 1997). The further up the ladder that we can locate a participatory initiative, the more authentic and child focused the participation is judged to be. The ladder of participation makes an important distinction between forms of 'non-participation', tokenistic forms between rungs 1 and 3, and legitimate forms of participation between rungs 4 and 8. It is not always clear that the more institutional and formal modes of participation deliver the changes that the children often advocate through the various forms of consultation and are likely to be judged as forms of 'non-participation'. At best they may be viewed as low level forms of consultation.

The issue turns on whether adults are judged by children to listen to their concerns and take them seriously. In some instances, participation has cosmetic aims in the way that adults are able to present their institutions as participatory without any substance. The danger here is that children eventually become cynical about all forms of participation if it is felt that they are not listened to, which can have implications for children's futures as active political participants (Matthews, 2003).

A third critical theme is the emphasis on event based rather than processual forms of participation. School councils appear to approximate to the latter with children involved in election and selection events, with those children successful taking on responsibilities to represent their peers for a fixed period of time. However, the work of school councils revolves around specific events such as council meetings where children have the opportunity to have their views formally recognised. There is very likely to be a lull in the participation between council meetings. School routines predominantly made up of adult-driven classroom activities are punctuated by, at most, twice termly meetings that may generate excitement among the child electorate (Wyness, 2009). At the international policy level children had no involvement in the 11 year process of drafting the CRC. Some attempts have been made to rectify this situation with international organisations such as the UN setting up events where child delegates are able to come into contact with heads of state and leaders of international organisations (Skelton, 2007). The Special Session on Children in 2002 was a 3-day event organised by the UN allowing child representatives from a range of countries to present their case for greater global recognition of the challenges that many children face. Around 7000 children attended these sessions alongside 70 heads of state including Nelson Mandela. These events may give the impression that children are involved in deliberations and reflections on the kinds of support networks for children at



local, national and international levels. At the same time, they may have limited influence on the routine aspects of living with or working with children, perpetuating the tokenist idea of children's participation.

A fourth criticism is often levelled at schools and local authorities for attracting a narrow field of children when introducing participatory initiatives. Schools have particularly come in for criticism in the way that participatory initiatives can often attract a similar group of children from a narrow range of backgrounds (Hill, 2006). Issues of social class, able-bodiedness and engagement with schooling in general can be used to differentiate between children who are more or less likely to take part in participation. The question is whether dominant modes of children's participation attract a diversity of children such that a wide range of children are represented. If we return to the dominant forms of children's participation it is possible that children whom have difficulties negotiating the culture and structure of schooling are less likely to take part in these forms of participation because the latter are seen by these children to be an extension of the norms and expectations of schools and therefore difficult to negotiate (Wyness, 2009). This critical issue has global significance with children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds often being excluded. To take one example: White and Choudhury (2007) refer to the work Indian children undertook to develop a programme for an Indian television station on the topic of child poverty in India. Poorer children took part in the production of this programme. However, it was a small minority of middle class children that dominated the project. They argued that they were better able to represent the plight of the poor than their working class counterparts due to their educational backgrounds and levels of articulation.

## **Emergent narrative**

An emergent body of work is heavily influenced by the critical narrative. However, here I want to highlight work that effectively defines participation in much broader terms and goes well beyond the institutional and discursive emphases. Three themes emerge here from this relatively new body of work: the multi-dimensional nature of participation; the diversity of contexts within which participation takes place and its embedded and relational nature.

### *Multi-dimensional*

Participation within this new narrative is multi-layered with research focusing on the affective and material dimensions, as well as children's discursive capacities. Jupp (2008) focuses on the emotions associated with participation including excitement, disappointment and anger, what are referred to as the 'everyday feelings and spaces' as children participate within their local communities. Kraftl and Horton (2007) discuss the affective and physical dimensions of participatory events where children engage with each other. Participation here is embodied, with an emphasis on the co-presence of bodies as children participate in events and processes related to decision-making. Importantly, one dimension that challenges the discursive emphasis within the dominant narrative here is the material nature of children's participation. Globally, the dominant narrative focuses on individual rights and voice with the CRC endorsing discursive voiced based conceptions of participation. While Kraftl and Horton (2007) emphasise the material and affective aspects of these discursive modes, the CRC and the international community are clear in their commitment to eliminating other material forms of children's participation such as child labour, which is seen to conflict with children's educational, material and social development (Wyness, 2013). The emergent narrative, on the other hand, views

working children, including children as carers and children's military involvement as legitimate means of participation. Given the challenging circumstances within which this work normally takes place, this is a highly contentious point. Nevertheless, what we can say is that there is some recognition at 'local' levels of the work children undertake within these different contexts (Wyness, 2016).

In the process there is an attempt to rebalance normative notions of participation with other material conceptions of participation which challenge the 'deviant' status attributed to the latter (Liebel, 2003). Research focuses on the need to recognise children's economic and material participation. The research in Sub-Saharan Africa on young carers as well as research on more routine work undertaken by children in more affluent settings highlights the agency of children and their capacity to manage challenging familial circumstances (Kendrick & Kakuru, 2012; Mayall, 2002). Furthermore, the field of participation also incorporates the commitments of global and regional organisations to rebalance discursive and material dimensions of participation in promoting the voices of working children (Liebel, 2003). Thus, while child workers participate in significant economic activities, they often have limited access to decision-making processes. Various working children's organisations such as *The International Movement of Working Children* set up in 1996 are committed to raising the profile of children's economic roles, and create channels through which children can pursue their interests in improving their working conditions.

### *Diversity*

In focusing more on material forms of participation we are recognising the diversity of different forms of participation. There is now a wider spectrum of sites and contexts within which

participation takes place. Firstly, the dominant narrative emphasises adult oriented institutional forms. We can broaden the institutional dimension to include the political role of children. This includes children organising themselves in trying to improve their working and school based lives (Liebel, 2003). There are also attempts to engage with children politically in terms of the provision of services offered by local authorities and policy formation. Thus, at the local community level UK policy there have been attempts to recognise children's capacity to make judgements about the services that local authorities should invest in. The UK government initiative of the 2000s *Every Child Matters* is a good example of this (Parton, 2011). Children were to be consulted on a range of issues relating to service provision within their local communities. Similarly, some countries have attempted to incorporate children within the policy formation process. If we take Scotland as an example, attempts have been made in the recent years to incorporate children within the educational policy process (Tisdall & Bell, 2006).

Secondly, within the more private and hidden sphere of family and care children's participation in families is more longstanding, more focused on the everyday routine aspects of family life (Mayall, 2002). Children participate in a number of different informal ways, including caring for family members, domestic work and mediating between family and the outside world. In effect, children's participation here is integrated within the work that others within the family undertake. Inter-generational relations and relations between siblings, involve complex arrangements where participation is routine, material and emotional (Wyness, 2015).

Thirdly, the virtual domain is both a site of and means through which children participate. Technological innovation in recent years has enabled children to play formative educational, political and social roles within public and private realms (Harris, 2008; Kenway & Bullen, 2001). Digital technology expands children's knowledge base, particularly with respect to global

issues relating to the environment, global capitalism and poverty. Teenage girls have set up their own websites and blogs in order to display and discuss a range of topics and focal points from politics through to fashion (Chittenden, 2010; Harris, 2008). Fourthly, and associated with the virtual realm, is the global market which has become an important arena within which children participate as consumers. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century advertisers targeted parents, in particular mothers, when trying to sell toys and merchandise to children (Seiter, 1995). Since the 1970s there has been a shift in focus with children being targeted directly by marketers and advertisers. Children have become more significant participants within a global consumer culture (Kenway & Bullen, 2001). While there is considerable controversy about the status of children's roles within global markets, there is support for children's participation here as discerning social agents with a capacity to make choices and rational decisions (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Seabrook, 1998). Children's roles as economic actors are also apparent on the streets, particularly in less affluent parts of the globe. Children here work with peers and family in developing and demonstrating survival, entrepreneurial and mediating skills (Estrada, 2012).

Finally, research provides an important and growing context within which children participate. Early research *on* children and childhood has given way to researching *with* and *by* children (Shaw, Brady & Davey, 2011). The dominance of the concept agency within childhood studies has ensured that children play a much more formative role within the research process. Various typologies have been constructed of the relationship between the child and the researcher (Fielding, 2006; Shaw, Brady & Davey, 2011). Most of them are adapted from Hart's ladder of participation, focusing on the way that children can move from one lesser more adult directed form of research to more child focused and child initiated forms. Thus Shaw, Brady and Davey

(2011) move from children as subjects being consulted on a range of issues to researching with children, where children work alongside adult researchers to a final model of the child as a 'research initiator' where children have more autonomy in shaping research agendas.

### *Relational*

Children's participation within an emergent narrative is more likely to be understood now in relational terms. The critique of tokenist forms of participation emphasises the limitations of participatory structures and initiatives in shifting generational power relations. It is a moot point as to whether children's participation challenges or reinforces existing relations between children and adults. The general thrust of the critical narrative is to shift power much further towards children or at the very least focus far more on authentic and genuine voices of children.

However, as Fielding (2007, p. 304) argues there now appears to be 'too sharp and too exclusive a focus on the standpoints of young people'. An emphasis on empowering individual children through participation has unwittingly led to the marginalisation of adult involvement. In the process the interdependent relationship between children and adults in a range of diverse settings has been neglected. Within the emergent narrative there is more emphasis on the different ways that children's participation is understood in terms of on-going relations between children and adults. Fielding's (2007) analysis of relations within English schools focuses on participation emerging out of 'intergenerational dialogue and collaboration'. Participation here is about children and adults work together in creating a more trusting and ethical context within which teaching and learning can take place in state schools.

There is also a more open sense in which different forms of participation can be located within different contexts. A range of forms of participation from consultation through to more child-initiated practices reflect different kinds of inter-generational relations. There is a more

eclectic approach to the meaning of participation with less of an emphasis on hierarchical approaches, which are drawn on in making judgements on the authenticity of participatory initiatives and practices (Hart, 1997). Thus, consultation is not necessarily a lesser form of participation, particularly where children are likely to weigh up their commitment to participatory forums against a commitment to retaining control over their ‘free’ time (Hill, 2006).

Moss and Petrie’s (2002) notion of children’s spaces here is instructive in terms of the range of contexts and capacities. Their empirical focus is on pre-school children and the ways in which these spaces can be constituted in and through the interactions of children with themselves and child professionals. They argue that their approach is relational. ‘The child is not regarded as an autonomous and detached subject, but as living in networks of relationships, involving both children and adults’ (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 143). They take some of their inspiration from the Reggio Emilia schools in Northern Italy where the emphasis is on democratic engagement as well as child empowerment (Ghirrotto & Mazzoni, 2013).

### **Framing Children’s Participation**

In reflecting on the expanding field of children’s participation it may be useful to draw on the work of American philosopher John Rawls. Archard (2015) in his theorising of childhood draws on Rawls’ distinction between ‘concept’ and ‘conception’. The former refers to a starting position in the analysis: children are assumed to be different from adults and childhood and adulthood as concepts can clearly be distinguished. In almost all historical periods and within most global settings children in some respects are separated from and viewed differently from adults. The latter refers to the different ways in which these concepts can be distinguished. One crude example might be the differences between African childhoods and English childhoods. The

latter is a period of the life-course where children have to juggle activities around play and school. In the former case children juggle school, play and work. Arguably the international political realm supports this difference. The CRC focuses on what states and organisations can do for children in terms of contexts for provision, protection and participation (Franklin & Franklin, 1996). This would underpin an English childhood. The African Charter (1999), on the other hand, was drafted 10 years after the CRC. It focuses more on what African children can do for their communities and families with an emphasis on children's responsibilities towards others (Twum-Danso, 2014). Thus, work becomes a social duty for children and their responsibilities combine with their rights to schooling and play. In effect, what Archard (2015) is arguing is that it makes sense to make a broad distinction between children and adults: it is difficult to think of historical, political and social contexts within which there are no differences. However, what counts and what is significant are the ways in which we can differentiate childhoods according to political, economic and cultural contexts. Within these contexts we can identify different conceptions of childhood.

If we apply this Rawlsian framework to children's participation we are effectively recognising the diversity of ways in which children participate, the different conceptions of children's participations. At the same time, our analysis departs from Archard's assumed concept of childhood. We need to specify conditions within which a phenomenon counts as participation, in Rawlsian terms, the *concept* of participation. I want to argue that a concept of children's participation would have to include certain elements. First, it would embrace the idea of *agency* in a broad sense. Participation implies children's capacity to make a difference to their lives and the lives of others in and through the relations they have with others (Oswell, 2013). It would go



beyond the narrow confines of institutional forms in that children's agency emerges within a range of diverse formal and informal settings.

Second, *voice* is a critical feature of children's participation. In one sense children having a say follows article 12 of CRC in that there are two elements. Children have the capacity to articulate their interests; they are in a stronger position to express their opinions. These interests have to be taken seriously: in article 12 terms, 'given due weight'. Where the concept of voice departs from the CRC is in the way that it encompasses all forms of communication allowing children of all ages to participate. In other words, we are talking about a broader concept of participation in that children's voices are not just reliant on adults for their legitimacy. There is a more relational dimension with children across the childhood age spectrum and adults negotiating what might count as voice (Alderson, 2008). Third, participation involves children playing some role within *decision-making processes*. The emphasis is on the embedded and relational nature of voice. As participants, children work alongside adults and peers in exploring a) the conditions of their participation, b) the form that this participation takes and c) the nature of any outcomes as a consequence of this participation. In sum a concept of children's participation means recognition of children's agency in the way that they are in a position to voice their interests and that these interests are recognised through decision-making processes within which children are prominent actors.

Conceptions of children's participation provide us with more detail on the form that this participation takes, given due account of the expanding range of contexts within which we find children. Archard (2015) draws on Rawls in arguing that there is little doubt that a concept of childhood exists: the key focus for childhood scholars here is the examination of different conceptions of childhood. I want to utilise the concept/conception framework a little differently.

Childhood scholars might accept the idea of a concept of childhood and invest their energies in explicating the differing conceptions. I want to focus more on the contested nature of the concept of children's participation. In other words, we cannot assume that child participation exists within all contexts. The focus here is on applying this framework to assess whether a particular context within which we find children counts as a form of participation. In other words, does it count as a form of participation in that it satisfies the 3 requirements of agency, voice and decision-making? Let us take the example of child labour which in normative terms is excluded from the category of participation. By applying this framework it may be difficult to view children's paid work in some countries as forms of participation. Banks' (2011) analysis of children's rights in Bangladesh identifies an imbalance between material and discursive forms of children's participation. Bangladeshi children have major responsibilities towards their parents and community. However, there is little sense in which the children have any say about these responsibilities; there is a limited capacity for children here to express an opinion or have any involvement in family decisions. Children's voices here are muted with a restricted access to decision-making capacities

There are, on the other hand, contexts where children have had to take collective responsibility with their peers to assert their right to a voice. Liebel's (2007) work has focused on the way that street children have been able to successfully organise themselves in order to further their collective interests as child workers. The Bhima Sangha child movement in Bangalore satisfies the conditions for inclusion within the category of children's participation (Reddy, 2000). With around 16,000 members child workers mainly located on the streets have successfully negotiated with welfare workers and local employers in improving their working conditions. Children here have a collective voice and demonstrate their agency in and through

negotiations with others in seeking to change their conditions and the working lives of other children. While these children would barely feature within the dominant narrative, the emerging ideas about agency, voice and participation would embrace the idea that child workers are also child participants. In returning to the difference between concept and conception of children's participation, we might argue that the Bhima Sangha satisfies the condition for inclusion as a concept of participation. Moreover, it becomes one among a number of different conceptions of children's participation. In different contexts we are likely to encounter these conceptions of participation where in different ways children demonstrate their agency and their voice through decision-making processes.

## **Conclusion**

The field of children's participation extends across political, economic, institutional, academic and private settings and sites. The emergent narrative in some ways is concerned with establishing that children's contributions within these contexts can be viewed more positively. The dominant narrative focuses on more established and legitimated participatory practices largely initiated and framed by adults in institutional terms. The CRC is a crucial frame of reference in locating children's participation within regulated adult driven contexts. At the same time it marginalises children's material economic and political capacities (Wyness, 2016). Despite some acknowledgement of cultural diversity the key principles of the Convention are that children are provided for and protected with limited adult regulated spaces within which children can participate. In drawing on Archard and Rawls it remains to be seen as to whether the dominant narrative allows for a clear concept of children's participation.

Agency is a central feature of the critical narrative and at the same time converges with the test of whether participation is authentic and driven by the interests of children; and whether children's agency is fully deployed in decision-making processes and practices. This question is central within the critical narrative. Institutional forms of participation in some ways compromise children's capacities to participate and make a difference. Participation here extends and refines an institution's capacity to regulate children's lives. Moreover, the dominance of performativity within many organisations where practices and policies are measured by prescribed outcomes limits children's capacities to participate. Within an educational context participation is at best subsumed within standardised assessments and the accountability of pupils, teachers and schools (Fielding, 2007). Pupil consultation becomes another institutional means through which school participants are drawn on in legitimating the position of schools. The test of authenticity here overlaps with the test of the concept: consultation in school offers children a voice, but is unlikely to establish them within decision-making processes and it is debatable whether children's agency is fully deployed.

Within the dominant narrative children who work within families and on the street, those children who sometimes assume dominant roles within the domestic economy are not viewed as legitimate participants. More recent research within the emergent narrative expands a frame of recognition in attempting to incorporate children's material and political contributions. While much of children's participation within the critical narrative is aspirational, the expanding of different forms incorporating material, emotional and intergenerational dimensions allow us to recognise forms of participation hitherto invisible or marginal to the broader political and social project of establishing children's rights to participate. Again, the concept/conception frame is useful in identifying these practices as forms of participation. While there is an underlying

broader concern over children's unequal access to resources and the distribution of dominant forms of participation, there is also some recognition within the research field of childhood studies of the different ways that more embedded and material forms both challenge and ameliorate these inequalities.

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